

The Socio-economic Situation of Chin National Falam Township, Chin State, Myanmar

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Abstract

This research examines the Socio-economic situation of Chin Nationals living in Falam Township, Chin State, Myanmar. The specific objectives of this research are to reveal their socioeconomic situation under the development programs conducted in the research areas, to explore their way of living based on the geographic features and to analyze their needs for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Key Informant Interview, Informal Interview and Focus Group Discussion are applied in this research. There are several outcomes: although the native peoples rely on the Government, UNDP, UNICEF and NGOs' activities, they additionally need enough money for their cultivation, as well as guidance for land restoration, food preservation and methods to increase market demand for their local products in order to respond other economic, social, educational and health needs.

Key words: development programs, sustainable development, poverty alleviation, livelihood, Socio-economic situation

1. Introduction

Capacity building research for sustainable development and poverty alleviation began to increase in Myanmar after 2010. Myanmar's new government started to practice democracy and planned to invite international investment to build the modernized nation. The international economic, political, social, and educational organizations also have cooperated with Myanmar's economic, political, social, and educational organizations to support the country. This research examines the local socioeconomic situation to consider their needs especially for their sustainable development and poverty alleviation. The study takes place in the Northwest of the country among the Chin people living in Falam Township, in Chin State.

2. Aim and Objectives

This research will explore the socio-economic situation of Chin nationals living in Falam Township, Chin State. The specific objectives of this research are to document their economy, education, health and social affairs; how they fulfill the necessities for their livelihood and to analyze and highlight the strong and weak points for their livelihood strategies.

3. Literature Review

Development

Seiji defined Development to involve more than raising real incomes. Recently there has been a renewed emphasis on factors like the quality of life, on education and health and on general social well-being. This is not to say that we are no longer concerned with economic growth, but rather, social and human development in conjunction with economic growth (Seiji, 1991). This definition is applied to evaluate the research area's development situation. When we consider development, human development, natural resources and environmental management are also considered.

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Gupta writes that development is a highly complex phenomenon, and the complexity gets further compounded as one move onto to the tribal context. The strategies of tribal development have to be area specific and in tune with the peculiar socio-cultural ethos to be effective and meaningful (Gupta, 1998). It is very important to conduct sustainable development program successfully. As development involves variegated components and contexts- human and non-human, economic and non-economic or social and cultural, governmental and non-governmental and spatial and temporal- it is rather hard to define it. Development policy needs to be formulated and designed to search for effective strategies to achieve integrated and harmonious development of tribal life and society (Gupta, 1998). This will be discussed later in more detail.

Sustainable development

This concept relates to the ways in which a country can meet the development of the present generation without compromising the opportunities of future generations with regard to environmental and human consequences. Without proper management and safeguarding the natural and human resources, sustainable development cannot occur (Seiji, 1991). Although the author describes sustainable development at the national level, in this paper I intend to focus on the local level to describe how they try to meet the development of the present generation without compromising the opportunities of future generations in that place.

Environmental quality

This quality affects economic growth by improving the health of the work force and by creating jobs in the environmental sector. The economy is not separate from the environment. Economic management and environmental quality: pollution, conservation, and proper management of renewable and nonrenewable resources are also important (Seiji, 1991). According to these statements, I examine the research area's environmental quality to understand how they manage their economy with the help of development programs, how they produce healthy and skilled workers for development, and how they grow their human resources to improve human development.

Stephen (1991) said that as the roles of government shift from direct management to supportive and facilitative roles, civil service and administrative systems will need to be reoriented and strengthened. This is also true for the role of government in local development programs for Myanmar.

Livelihood

According to Chamber and Conroy, a livelihood comprises the capabilities, assets and activities required for the means of living. A livelihood is sustainable when it can cope with and recover from stress and shocks and maintain or enhance its capabilities and assets both now and in the future, while not undermining the natural resource base (Chamber & Conroy, 1991). In this paper, the Sustainable Livelihood framework (SLF) is used to measure the socio-economic situation of Chin people from the research areas (<http://www.oneworld.org/odi/keysheet/>).

Sein (2009) also listed the dimensions of poverty to be: 1) income and assets 2) having no voice or power and 3) vulnerability. To attack poverty, promote opportunity, facilitate empowerment and enhance security all these together are essential. These factors are considerable for the native people's socioeconomic development. On these things depends on the people's future.

4. Research Methodology

Research areas

Research villages are located in NW Myanmar in Falam Township, Chin State and include Mangkheng, Laizo, Lungpi, C.zamual, Congheng, C.zamualand Parte, Lumbang Villages. Fieldwork consists of collecting data to analyze their socio-economic situation in order to consider their sustainable development and poverty alleviation. It will be a sample that represents people making their lives in mountainous and hilly regions.



Figure 1. Location of Falam Township.

- Source: joshua project (2015)
- population in Falam is 77.000.
- The largest religion is Christianity and other is Ethnic religion.
- Main language is Falam

Research populations

Research subjects are the villagers from the six principal villages, especially village leaders, teachers, health workers, pastors, farmers and researchers who work at UNDP, GRET and villagers who are conducting economic, social and educational and health affairs for the villagers.

Study period

The study period is one year, from 1-4-2014 to 31-3-2015.

Research methods

Key Informant interviews, Informal Interview and Focus Group Discussion are applied to collect the relevant data.

Research design

Descriptive research design is used to describe the data.

Socio-economic Situations of Research Areas

Historical background

FalamTownship lies in the northern part of Chin with the north border with *Tedim* and northern *Haka*. The east-west length of the township is about 40 miles while the north-south dimension is 26.8 miles (about 40 km). Thus, the area of *Falami*Township measures 990.12 square miles and includes 179 villages. According to the census of 2014, the population is

about 41,395. It includes ten different tribal people. Among these villages, Mangkheng, Laizo, Lungpi, C.zamual, Congheng and Parthe are selected as the research areas. Although they use *Falam* language, some speak the national *Bamar* language when they have relationship outsiders. In the study areas, their main economy is agriculture of crops and gardens. For extra income, they rear animals, hunt and fish. Most villagers who are above 20 years old live abroad in places such as India, Malaysia, Singapore and the USA as refugee and migrant workers.

In Falam Township, there are many development programs. Among them, the work of the UNDP, UNICEF, as well as other NGOs (GRET and the Garunar Foundation) which are regarded as development programs by the local people. The socio-economic situation of Chin nationals living in Falam Township and the interaction of the development programs and the people's livelihood strategies are mentioned in this research. When I conducted the interviews, their education, economy, social affairs and health were focused on to discover how they reduce poverty; how they try to promote their education; how they plan to improve their health; and how to train their villagers to become resourceful persons for improving their livelihood sustainability.

The government's development plans are also examined. The alleviation of poverty and upgrading of the socio-economy of the people are being carried out in Myanmar. In other words, to motivate the regional development and to alleviate poverty within the villages of the regions and within the states, the following developments were carried out: 1) Development of agricultural production, 2) Development of livestock breeding and production of goods within the rural regions, 3) Development of small-scale production of goods within the rural region, 4) Development of small-scale privately owned co-operative credit societies, 5) Development of the socio-economy of the rural areas, 6) Conservation of the natural environment, 7) Development of cooperative enterprises and 8) Development of power energy in the rural regions.

In Myanmar, especially in Chin State, a terrace cultivation system has been supported by the government since 2002 (San Thein, 2012). The government's development programs are also found in my research areas. NGOs' development programs are also allowed to work in these villages.

Socio-economic situations in Mangkheng

Mangkheng is situated 10 miles to the west of Falam City. East of it is Di Phan. West of it is Than Rawm. Its area is 2 square miles. The population is 663. Males are 333 and females are 330. It was founded 500 years ago by the Hlaun Ceu ethnic group which is a sub group of the Chin.

Economy

Their main economy is based on agriculture and the main crops are corn, onion, garlic and ginger. Corn is for animal feed, especially for chickens and pigs. Onion, garlic and ginger are the most important crops for them. As they have good transportation with India, Indian traders come to buy their products. As for animal husbandry, cows, mythun (a kind of bird), chickens, pigs and horses are raised for extra income. Horses are also used for transportation. Some villagers make money by cutting and clearing trees for cultivation (*Taungya*) and for firewood. As their main economy is agriculture, they need to get enough water for their crops. The UNDP provided them water by using pipes from a stream. They want to use solar power for lighting.

Social affairs

There are many religious congregations, mainly Christian. These several congregations help with auspicious and inauspicious matters of the villagers. A group of women from the village save and lend money with 2% interest as a self-help system. They use the loans to buy and raise pigs, chickens and cows, to repair their house and cover the roof of the house with the sheets of zinc, and so on. There is an organization to control animals in this village. This is organized by men from the village. After they have discussed how to maintain and protect the places for animal's feed, they made fences at these places with wire or wood. A committee for road construction is also in this village. The roads in the village are constructed by the villagers. The villagers have to pay the cost for road construction. Although there is also a women's affairs organization in this village, there is no any activity at present.

As for other collaborative activities, they celebrate the harvest festival during the October holidays. When they celebrate this festival, they always invite near villagers. They share snacks made of sticky rice with all visitors. They celebrate this ceremony four or five days. During the festival, football matches, competition for singing, recitation of bible and performance of traditional dance and music are conducted. This festival is organized by Church members and villagers.

Another event is reciprocity for building a house. If someone wants to build a house, other villagers help to build it. When they celebrate the harvest festival, they used to have to kill 3 or 5 pigs to offer to the local spirit. After converting to Christianity, they abandoned animism. When they want to celebrate the harvest festival, they invite the pastor from their respective congregation and other villagers for a blessing.

Education

They built and opened a kindergarten funded through a self-help system in this village in 2000. In 2014, they donated it to the government to maintain. They have social and religious organizations, too. Members of these organizations arrange to give vocational training to the other villagers and some are sent to attend vocational training held in other villages and towns. Vocational training such as handicrafts based on cotton or plastic, and techniques for making snacks and other foods (for women), and how to make natural fertilizer (for men) are taught. This training is important for capacity building; in other words, for the villagers' sustainable development and poverty alleviation. Although there is no Chin literature and cultural association, Chin language and literature are taught as a course in their education programs in Churches.

Health

There is a village health care center in this village, but it was closed three years ago as there is no doctor and health worker to work there. In this village, diarrhea and malaria are common during the early rainy season of April and May. They think that diarrhea occurs because of the drinking water. Malaria is because of migrant workers who come back from India. Some of the people who are over 60 have hypertension, asthma, and strokes. These may relate to their living style. When they feel ill, they go to consult the midwife from other village health center or the doctor at the hospital in Kalay. If they have an emergency case, they go to the hospital in Kalay. Some buy prescription medicine. They would like to be able

to treat their disease with a doctor or health worker in their own village health care center. For maternal health, they rely on the midwife from another village health center.

Needs of sustainable development and poverty alleviation

According to the interviews, the following facts are represented as the villagers' voice and desire for their sustainable development and poverty alleviation.

- 1) To get electricity for the whole day and night. Electricity greatly builds capacity.
- 2) To have good transportation. It is also a main factor for community development and to reduce poverty.
- 3) To change the teacher's transfer system. It is carried out in June or November generally. In Myanmar, the school year begins the first week of June and ends in the second week of March. Summer holiday is from the third week of March to last week of May for basic education.
- 4) To get enough text books for students.

In this village, there are 20 persons with formal education. Some are government salary people and some are migrant laborers. Some are refugees who now live in the USA. They support and donate their income to the church, to the school and for teacher housing. As they can support their families and the community development, younger generations have dreams to go abroad to make money, too. This remittance money is also necessary to consider for sustainable development and poverty alleviation. It can be said that it is a kind of brain and labor loss. When we consider sustainable development and poverty alleviation, this outmigration is also an important fact to be considered.

Socio-economic situations of Zarlai

Zarlai or Laizosub-group of Chin lives in Zarlai Village. It is situated 8 miles to the west of Falam city. West of it is Thlanrawn. MangKheng is to the east of it. The total population is 375. Males are 172 and females are 185. Total houses are 92. This is a new village which was established 23th October 2013 as their old village was destroyed by land slide. Their old village was situated 3 miles from Falam city.

Economy

Their economy is based on cultivation. As they were busy building the new village, they cannot spend time to plant vegetables in their gardens. They want to get temporary permission from the government to quarry stone in their neighboring mountains. They try to get permission from the government as it is one way to support their livelihood. In addition, migrant workers support villagers' needs such as building the primary school, providing a teacher's house and maintaining the church in their village. They also help to revitalize Laizo villagers in setting up their new village. They also pay the salary for teachers who are not sent by government appointment.

Social affairs

The Zarlai Youth Peace Association is in this village. This association consists of 15 males and 5 females. They help with their village's needs during times of celebration or mourning. They also are ready to help villagers who are unable to do work by themselves such as house building or repair and so on.

